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Snoop Dogg, Raekwon, LL Cool J Rhyme for Jam Master Jay at New York's J.A.M. Awards

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By Laura Checkoway
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New York's Finest vigilantly patrolled the streets near Manhattan's Hammerstein Ballroom last night because New York's grimeiest were on the bill -- Mobb Deep, M.O.P., Jim Jones, Papoose, Raekwon, as well as a guy from Cali known as Snoop Dogg. The rappers were assembled for a peaceful cause, though: the J.A.M. Awards, a tribute to the late Jam Master Jay's vision of Justice, Arts & Music. (Despite more than five years of "ongoing investigation," the Run-DMC DJ's murder has yet to be solved; proceeds from the show went to the MJJ Foundation for music, which supports arts education in urban and rural schools.)

Kid Capri opened the show and De La Soul set a happy-go-lucky tone with classics including "Buddy." As Warner Music exec Lyor Cohen watched from the crowd, the mood darkened and the energy amped as Prodigy of Mobb Deep brought the streets to stage, minus his partner Havoc, with a crew of about fifteen hype men in FREE P hoodies and T-shirts (Prodigy was recently sentenced to three and a half years in prison for gun

possession, which he'll start serving in January). The crowd cheered as he went into "Quiet Storm," and roared for "Shook Ones," chanting along like it was a cold night in mid-Nineties Queensbridge.

After Dead Prez presented the Justice Award to Chuck D, who couldn't make it to the show, EPMD took the stage to perform classics including "You Gots to Chill," "So Wat Cha Sayin'" and "Headbanger." LL Cool J joined them for a verse, putting his fist in the air for JMJ. Q-Tip and Talib Kweli hung out backstage, but Snoop Dogg took over out front, performing "187" and "Gin & Juice." "Oh man, it feels so good to be in the Big Apple!" Snoop exclaimed, though he's been busy in Hollywood lately, with his reality show *Father Hood* premiering on E! December 9th. After "Drop It Like It's Hot," Snoop and his entourage squeezed through the packed backstage, where guys gave him pounds and shout outs as he passed. "Yo, Snoop! Why you always come through with those big-ass dudes?" someone jokingly called out. "I gotta hold on for my life, man," Snoop responded, laughing.

Biz Markie took the stage next in a fur hat and coat to introduce Brooklyn's rowdy M.O.P., who turned the front rows of the crowd into a mosh pit. Soon, Everlast was singing Run-DMC rhymes to a country-blues tune, playing guitar and doing his own rendition of Johnny Cash. Marley Marl stood by in a tight suit on the sidelines, hiding his reaction beneath his sunglasses. Wyclef Jean won the Music Award, but was "out of the country."

Dead Prez next performed their rousing "Hip Hop," chanting "hip hop, kill cops" before Papoose flexed his skills by rapping as many words as he could for each letter of the alphabet at top speed. When they swaggered onstage, Jim Jones and Juelz Santana looked like they were having the most fun of the night on "Pin the Tail," "Emotionless" and "We Fly High (Ballin')." "I feel like I'm Run-DMC up here," Jimmy said, referencing his Adidas letterman jacket and shell-toes. The crowd booed when Dipset left the stage before the last track was even over -- they wanted more but there was no encore. Last night was a series of cameos and stop-through performances.

Taking the stage with a large entourage and a slew of random tag-alongs, Wu-Tang Clan's Raekwon the Chef was the final act of the night with "Criminology," "Glaciers of Ice," "Ice Water" and "Ice Cream." "I met that man one time and the energy was so real, it was like I walked away from an uncle!" Rae said of JMJ. Loyal fans upfront rap along with "Incarcerated Scarfaces," though the balconies have emptied out. Everyone onstage was holding a peace sign in the air, and the audience followed suit as he proclaimed, "Thank you everybody for coming in peace!" Outside, a police squadron waited and watched as fans walked down 34th Street, past row upon row of NYPD vans and sedans, into the brisk night.

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